

# Much Ado

by Susan Paris

**MS CHEKHOV** (a science teacher) • **JACK PETERSON** (a pompous director)  
**CALLUM** • **OPHELIA** • **TASI** • **BO** • **ISAAC** (students)

**Scene:** A bare stage. Enter **MS CHEKHOV**. She speaks to the audience.

**MS CHEKHOV** (very excited). We have a real treat today: a visit from the acclaimed Shakespearian director, Jack Peterson! He should be here now. (She looks at her watch impatiently.) Mr Peterson?

**MS CHEKHOV** peers off-stage, looking for **JACK PETERSON**, who enters from the other side holding a loud hailer. **MS CHEKHOV** doesn't see him.

**MS CHEKHOV** (calling). Mr Peterson?

**JACK PETERSON** (through the loud hailer). Greetings, Ms Chekhov!

**MS CHEKHOV** (startled but quickly recovering). Goodness.

A hailer? Just for us?

**JACK PETERSON**. All the world's a stage, Ms Chekhov.

**MS CHEKHOV** (enthusiastically). Of course!

I couldn't have put it better myself. Thank you for coming, Mr Peterson. The students are a little nervous. I trust you'll keep this in mind.

**JACK PETERSON**. Some are born great, Ms Chekhov, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them.

**MS CHEKHOV** (nodding). You're a wise man, Mr Peterson.

**JACK PETERSON**. I think you'll find Shakespeare's wiser. (He speaks through the loud hailer.) Now, where are my actors?

**CALLUM, OPHELIA, TASI, BO, and ISAAC** enter.

**MS CHEKHOV**. Mr Peterson, meet five very talented drama students.

**JACK PETERSON**. We'll see, shall we. Let us begin with "Hamlet".

**CALLUM** (muttering). "Hamlet!" What about a comedy?

**JACK PETERSON** (through the loud hailer). Quiet on stage, please! You're here to learn, not whisper. (He points to **CALLUM**.) Young man, you can be Hamlet. We'll start with his famous soliloquy. (He passes **CALLUM** a script.) A soliloquy is the act of speaking one's thoughts aloud when one is by oneself, usually when one is being tested in some way.

**CALLUM** (nodding). Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie.

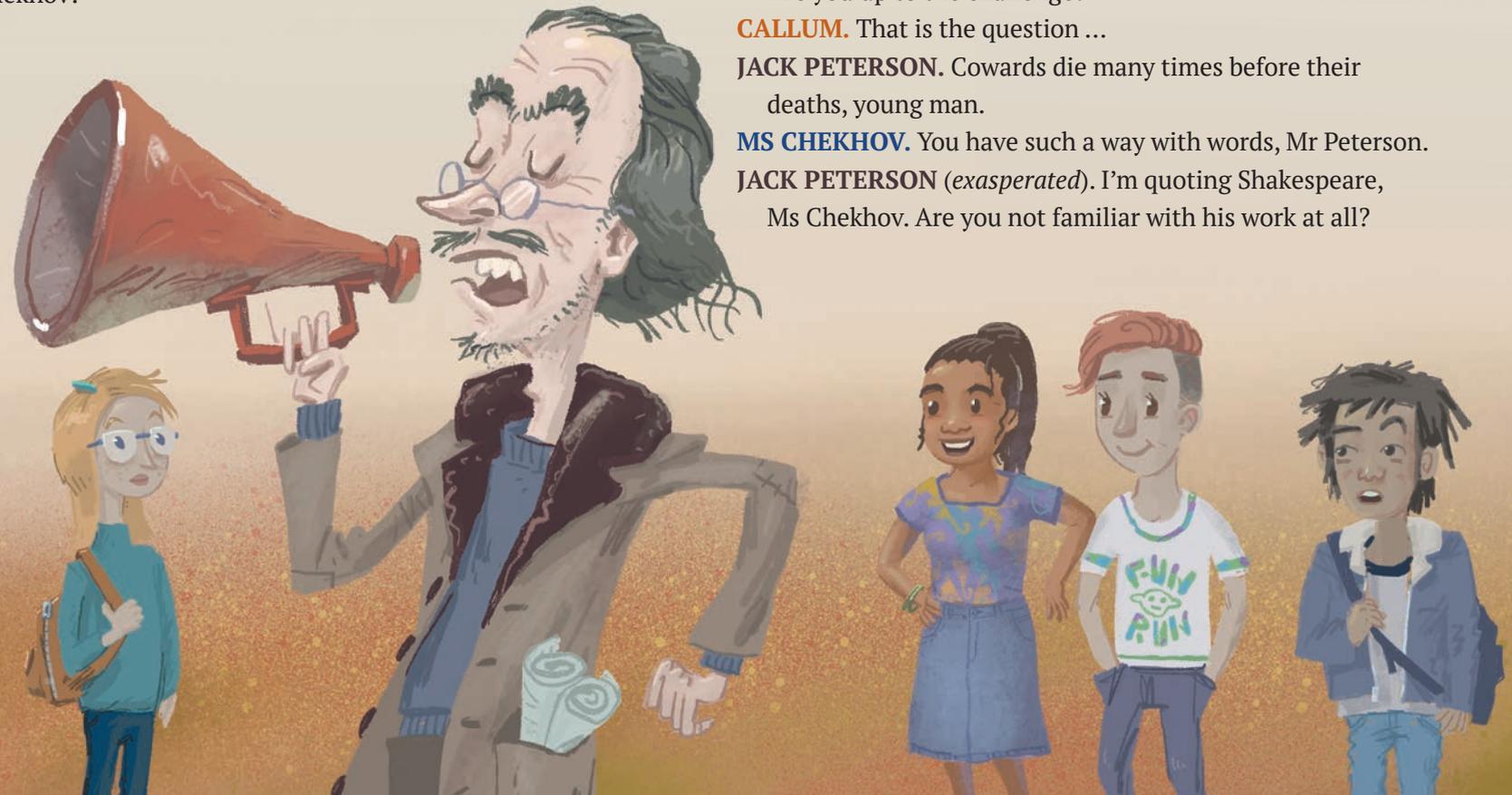
**JACK PETERSON** (not listening). For this soliloquy, the hero is alone in the castle, examining the dark recesses of his soul. (He speaks to **CALLUM**.) Are you up to the challenge?

**CALLUM**. That is the question ...

**JACK PETERSON**. Cowards die many times before their deaths, young man.

**MS CHEKHOV**. You have such a way with words, Mr Peterson.

**JACK PETERSON** (exasperated). I'm quoting Shakespeare, Ms Chekhov. Are you not familiar with his work at all?



**MS CHEKHOV** (*laughing nervously*). Actually, I'm the science teacher – the drama teacher's sick today.

**JACK PETERSON** (*dramatically*). Get thee to a nunnery!

**MS CHEKHOV** (*uncertainly*). Shakespeare?

**JACK PETERSON** (*nodding*). Shakespeare. (*He speaks through the loud hailer.*) Right, let's go.

**CALLUM**. To be or not to be, that is the question –

**JACK PETERSON** (*interrupting*). More passion!

**CALLUM** (*muttering*). Warped, tickle-brained varlot.

**JACK PETERSON**. Pardon?

**CALLUM**. I said: Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune or to take arms against a sea of troubles –

**JACK PETERSON**. No, no, no! Where's the feeling? Hamlet is beset with slings and arrows.

**CALLUM** (*teasing*). Should I dodge around a bit?

**JACK PETERSON** (*exasperated*). What on earth are you talking about? Let's try someone else. (*He points at OPHELIA and shouts through the loud hailer.*) You there.

**OPHELIA** (*nervously*). Ophelia.

**JACK PETERSON** (*surprised and pleased*). Yes! How did you know?

**OPHELIA**. It's what my parents call me.

**JACK PETERSON**. Perfect. You won't miss your cues. (*He passes OPHELIA a script.*) Ophelia is a pivotal role. She has just betrayed her lover and is now mourning his decline. Proceed.

**OPHELIA** (*a little wooden*). O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown! The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's eye, tongue, sword –

**JACK PETERSON**. It's not a shopping list, Ophelia. It's a lamentation.

**OPHELIA** (*muttering*). Rank, onion-eyed minnow.

**JACK PETERSON**. Pardon?

**OPHELIA**. I said: Th' expectancy and rose of the fair state, the glass of fashion, and the mould of form, th' –

**JACK PETERSON** (*through the loud hailer*). Enough, Ophelia.

**MS CHEKHOV**. Thank you, dear.

**JACK PETERSON** (*pointing to TASI*). Who's that?

**MS CHEKHOV**. That's Tasi ... I believe she's very good.

**JACK PETERSON**. All that glitters is not gold, Ms Chekhov.

**MS CHEKHOV**. Shakespeare?

**JACK PETERSON** (*nodding*). Shakespeare. (*He speaks to TASI, who fidgets nervously.*) I'll be taking you through ... what's the matter?

**TASI**. I'm a bit nervous.

**JACK PETERSON**. Don't be ridiculous. Why?

**TASI**. There are too many people watching.

**JACK PETERSON**. I thought you were an accomplished actor?

**TASI**. I am, just not in front of an audience.

**JACK PETERSON** (*dryly*). Interesting. Let's try Macbeth's soliloquy. Our hero has been informed of his wife's death. He is a broken man. (*He passes TASI a script.*) Go.

**TASI** (*very quietly*). Out, out, brief candle! Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more.

**JACK PETERSON**. Oh, the irony! You squeak like a mouse.

**TASI** (*muttering*). Pribbling, ill-nurtured maggot-pie.

**JACK PETERSON**. What?

**TASI**. I said: It is a tale, told by an idiot –

**JACK PETERSON**. Enough!

**MS CHEKHOV**. I think they're doing very well. Really, Mr Peterson! You're being a little harsh, don't you think?

**JACK PETERSON**. I don't. Children can win Oscars under the right tutelage. (*He points at Bo.*) You – who are you?

**BO**. I'm Bo.

**JACK PETERSON**. Now you're Juliet. (*He points at ISAAC.*) And you – Romeo. You're lovers from warring families, acting the famous balcony scene.

**BO**. But we don't have a balcony.

**JACK PETERSON**. No doubt you can't act, either, so we'll be working around that too. Bo, stand over there and pretend you're on a balcony. Isaac, stand over there and pretend you're not on a balcony. (*He passes Bo and ISAAC their scripts.*) Romeo, you have been up all night. It's now early morning. You are waiting in the Capulet's garden, hoping to catch sight of your love. Suddenly, she appears. (*He shouts through the loud hailer.*) Proceed.

**ISAAC**. But, soft, what light through yonder window breaks? It is the east, and Juliet is the sun!

**JACK PETERSON.** Awful, but let's push on.

**ISAAC** (*muttering*). Bootless, beetle-headed bladder.

**JACK PETERSON.** Pardon?

**ISAAC.** I said: Arise fair sun and kill the envious moon, who is already sick and pale with grief –

**JACK PETERSON.** Alas, the moon is not alone. Your performance pains me, Romeo. Juliet, your lines.

**BO.** O, Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo? Deny thy father and refuse thy name.

**JACK PETERSON** (*through the loud hailer*). No, no, no!

**BO** (*muttering*). Surly, rump-fed puttock.

**JACK PETERSON.** I heard that!

**BO** (*innocently*). What, Shakespeare?

**JACK PETERSON** (*sadly to himself*). How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child.

**CALLUM.** If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not **revenge**?

*Ms CHEKHOV steps between them and makes a show of consulting her watch.*

**MS CHEKHOV.** Gosh, we're about done here, Mr Peterson. I have a science class to teach. Thank you so much for your time.

**JACK PETERSON.** Sadly, it has been entirely wasted, Ms Chekhov. I should have known that nothing will come of nothing.

**MS CHEKHOV.** Shakespeare?

**JACK PETERSON** (*leaving*). Yes, Ms Chekhov. Shakespeare!

**BO** (*calling to JACK PETERSON*). Good night! Good night! Parting is such sweet sorrow.

**MS CHEKHOV.** Well, a challenging lesson. But as they say, all's well that ends well! (*She pauses and looks thoughtful.*) Now, who did say that?

**CALLUM, OPHELIA, TASI, BO, and ISAAC.** Shakespeare!



illustrations by Gavin Mouldey

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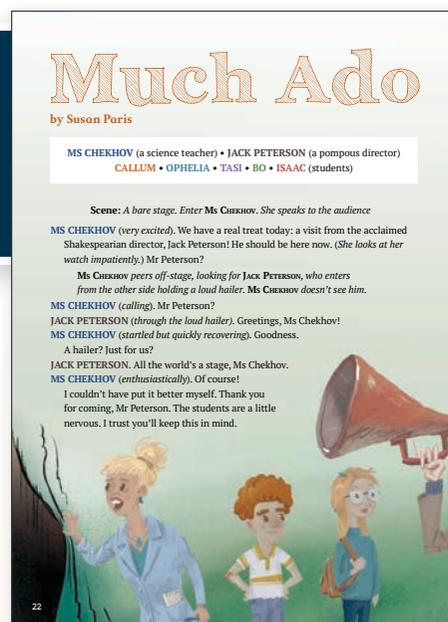
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